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Royal Calkins
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New DA picks right-hand man

District attorney

By **MAY WONG**
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Newly appointed District Attorney Ron Ruiz has named his chief deputy, a prosecutor who has held the job before.

George Kovacevich, a former judge, was former District Attorney Art Danner's first chief deputy in the late 1970s. Now, at age 53, he has given up his current position as supervisor of the DA Office's sexual-assault unit to work side-by-side with Ruiz.

"I've come full circle I guess," Kovacevich said Tuesday after accepting Ruiz's offer.

Kovacevich received the promotion even though he was a strong supporter of Kate Canlis, the acting district attorney who was one of eight candidates for the district at-

torney's post. Kovacevich was among 17 prosecutors who signed a petition endorsing Canlis.

"That was then and this is now," he said Tuesday.

Kovacevich said he looks forward to working with Ruiz, a San Jose criminal defense lawyer who was appointed district attorney last week on a 3-to-2 vote of the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors.

"This time, with Ron coming in new with a mandate of sorts to change things in a positive constructive

way, it's exciting to be part of that," he said.

"I think we have a real commitment on both our parts to be candid and forthright with each other ... with the freedom to disagree," he added.

Ruiz wasted no time choosing Kovacevich. Tuesday was just his second official day on the job.

"He was the last person on my mind, but in talking to him and others, he seemed like the best person," Ruiz said.

Ruiz said he chose Kovacevich because of his experience, dedication, and honesty. "He told me right off the bat (he supported Canlis) but it really isn't a problem with me."

Kovacevich was chief deputy district attorney under Danner for two years before



Kovacevich

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leaving to pursue other interests, including skiing, starting a family, writing books on religious art, studying theology and teaching religious art at Mount Angel Seminary in Oregon.

He returned to be a prosecutor with the District Attorney's Office in 1991 and was named as a Superior Court judge in 1994. He later lost the judgeship in an election and joined a private firm in Visalia, doing criminal and civil work. He rejoined the District Attorney's Office in May 1998.

More changes are in store for the District Attorney's Office. As Ruiz promised county supervisors, he plans to soon hire an administrator to oversee personnel and finance issues. Ruiz said he expects to have someone selected for that job by Monday.